Distance and Empathy: Constructing the Spectator of Annie Sprinkle's *Post-POST PORN MODERNIST—Still in Search of the Ultimate Sexual Experience*

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Today, after seventeen years in the porn industry, ex-sex worker Annie Sprinkle is a performance artist. In her recent performance piece "Post-Post Porn Modernist Still in Search of the Ultimate Sexual Experience," Sprinkle talks about her life as a former porn star and ex-prostitute.

The show's topic is sex, which Sprinkle "understands as her hobby, politics, spiritual experience, expertise, main subject matter . . . and the key to her great health and happiness" (Program note, Theatre Oobleck, October 1991). The performance is visually graphic: Sprinkle urinates and douches on stages, invites the spectator to look at her cervix, performs a "bosom ballet," and introduces sex toys for the fulfillment of various sexual desires. In a series of loosely linked segments, her narration moves through the different stages in her life and reveals its changes, both in job and attitude. To complement her stories, Sprinkle uses sets of slides; for instance, the "pornstistics" [sic], showing an image of the Empire State Building as a demonstration of the length of all the penises she "sucked," or a diagram that reveals in percentages her reasons for becoming a sex worker.

I had the opportunity to see Sprinkle's performance piece on two separate occasions and in two different cultural contexts in 1991, once in Berlin in July and once in Chicago in October. Although the performance had basically remained the same, my reactions were almost directly opposite. As a trained resistant feminist reader with a strong awareness of the representation of women and the female body on stage, I found myself rejecting Sprinkle's piece after seeing her for the first time in Berlin. I felt offended and vulnerable as a woman, and interpreted the display as serving, yet again, the male gaze only. When I saw Sprinkle in Chicago, however, I felt distanced enough to look at the whole performance instead of singling out individual images. I thoroughly appreciated

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the show's subversiveness and Sprinkle's politics of representation. My different responses led me to consider questions of context, reception, and interpretation since the performance texts were produced in radically different ways in each site. To explore these questions I will read the performance contexts and my own responses intertextually.

Situated in the center of the current highly controversial discussions around "pornography" and censorship, Sprinkle's performance evokes strong spectatorial responses because it displays blatant and—for the genre of performance art—culturally taboo images of the female body.[1] These responses, I am proposing here, are both emotional and rational, and "happen" both consciously and unconsciously, voluntarily and involuntarily.

Through foregrounding the politics of representation, postmodern performance theoretically invites the spectator to identify with a position rather than a character, seemingly bypassing involuntary emotional identification. As Linda Hutcheon says: "postmodernism's initial concern [is] . . . to de-naturalize . . . ; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' . . . are in fact 'cultural'" (2). Postmodernism then points to representation itself while acknowledging the traditional history of representation as ideologically circumscribed instead of as natural, true, or real. "A study of representation," Hutcheon says, "becomes not a study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past" (7). In effect, the postmodern production tries to provoke the spectator into resisting unconscious psychological identification. Spectatorial pleasure ostensibly is evoked through the creation of distance from the narrative or characters on stage. Instead, I suggest that any distance evoked is always inevitably linked to a spontaneous emotional response, and that spectatorial pleasure seems to derive from an oscillation between an overlaying of distance and responsiveness. Therefore, resistance, like identification, can be conscious, intuitive, or both.

In this essay, I will focus on the interplay of spectatorial responses and the performance's strategies to anticipate or limit the range of meaning it produces. Reading the production of meaning is a complex negotiation between both the spectator and the piece itself. Although my focus will be on the spectator and the cultural environment, I assume that the piece itself guides spectatorial responses including my own interpretation of authorial intent. This does not mean that my point here is to uncover Sprinkle's purpose, but it perhaps explains my own, sometimes conflicting, reading of the act. My use of terms like "strategy," "demystification," or "deconstruction" implies a (political) agenda on the performer's part that may or may not coincide with Sprinkle's actual intentions.

I, therefore, want to acknowledge that my reading is only one of many possible ones, produced by my personal background, the cultural frame of each performance, and what I take to be the production's strategies to lead the spectator into certain readings and away from others.

Whether these strategies function to deconstruct conventional perceptions and representations of pornography or to perpetuate them is contingent upon the specific cultural apparatus in which the stage images are embedded. How do different techniques guide the spectator's response in various sites? Can these techniques effectively provoke self-reflexivity? Does the piece stimulate identification, empathy, or resistance with regard to performer, images, and/or representations? For whom? Are there satisfactory models for assessing the relationship between identification and resistance? How can I address these issues without positing myself as a "generalized subject," and thereby replicating the structures of the hegemonic tradition?

My analysis is situated between materialist feminist and poststructuralist theories. I assume that gender is a key category in positioning the spectator—both from the standpoint of the performer and the spectator—at this moment in history, particularly for this performance and the discourses that surround it. The current censorship debates, for example, are an example of how the cultural frame constructs gendered spectatorial responses.[2] Closely linked to the concept of the gendered spectator is the notion of the male gaze developed by feminist film theoreticians. E. Ann Kaplan, for instance, states:

> our culture is deeply committed to myths of demarcated sex differences, called "masculine" and "feminine," which in turn revolve first on a complex gaze apparatus and second on dominance-submission patterns. This positioning of the two sex genders in representation clearly privileges the male (through the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism, which are male operations, and because his desire carries power/action where women's usually does not). (29)

Sprinkle's piece relies on the fetishization of the female body in Western culture, on the spectator's recognition of the (female) body as an object of (male) sexual desire. It reproduces a gender division of spectatorial responses. The female body is always already framed through the cultural and ideological apparatus, here, the traditional context of the sex industry. The spectatorial process reserves the subject position for the male, who looks at the woman as an object and leaves the woman only a position of identification with the woman, with the objectified body that is being looked at.

In Sprinkle's show, this process becomes more complex as she displays her body *and* assumes a subject position. Not only does she uncover the process of creating "porn images," but she articulates her own sexual desires and positions herself as post-porn. By transforming herself into a sexual display object in front of the spectators while describing the process of transformation, Sprinkle exposes the spectatorial gaze, voyeurism, and the desire to look. The act of speaking, of commenting on the construction of her body as a sex object, becomes an act of returning the spectator's look, of looking back. Yet Sprinkle does not resist the gaze. She displays herself for the spectator's look but inserts her own agency, thereby deconstructing the usual (gender) power dynamic of a pornographic display with the anonymous male consumer and the fetishized naked female body. The piece places traditionally enticing images of the female nude into the theatrical conventions of performance art, providing the performer with a subject position that the porn star usually does not have.

By the same token, Sprinkle's performance deconstructs traditional notions of pornography and undermines the essentialization of the female porn star or prostitute. In her two-and-a-half-hour show, she explains why she wanted to enter the sex industry: "It wasn't at all like the nightmare depicted on T.V. or in the movies. . . . I liked having sex with the guys" (13).

The show is framed by a description of "her self" in the different phases of her life. In thirteen brief episodes, Sprinkle talks about the shifts in her identity, from Ellen Steinberg, the shy, inhibited middle-class daughter, to Annie Sprinkle, the ambitious pornstar, to Anya, the new age feminist and ritual goddess. Slides first reveal the transformations from Ellen to Annie: "Ellen was excruciatingly shy. Annie is an exhibitionist. Ellen wore orthopaedic shoes and flannel nightgowns. Annie wears six-inch spiked high heels and sexy lingerie" (85). Later, the slides describe the differences between Annie and Anya: "Annie Sprinkle loves everybody. Anya loves herself. Annie Sprinkle seeks attention. Anya seeks awareness. Annie Sprinkle is a feminist. Anya is a Goddess" (118, 119).

While the slides provide the background information about her life and her sexual experiences, her body becomes the site for her construction of the porn star. She foregrounds the economic aspects of pornography. "The higher your heels, and the longer your hair," she says, putting on a blond wig and 10-inch high heels, "the more money you make. You can't walk in these shoes but you don't have to. You just sit on the bed." By pointing to the process of adorning the body for the display event rather than showing only the final representation, Sprinkle demystifies any traditional connotations of the porn star that construe her as a matter of sexuality and passion rather than primarily one of economics and power.

At a different moment, Sprinkle urinates and douches on stage before inviting spectators up to the stage to look at her cervix. By forcing the spectators to participate in this display, by asking them to take pictures of her or of themselves with her, Sprinkle foregrounds voyeurism as producing the images she creates. During both performances in Berlin and Chicago, so many spectators follow Sprinkle's invitation to walk up to the stage and take pictures that spectators left in the auditorium can only look at her behind a number of spectators and their expensive camera equipment. This moment positions all spectators as voyeurs behind the camera, accomplices in the production, consumption, and representation of pornography. As Kaplan argues, "the gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position" (30).

Sprinkle constructs images of herself for display, the object "to-be-looked-at," but foregrounds this construction in two different ways. First, she performs the process of constructing the porn star by putting on different clothes in front of the spectators, revealing the various sex tools and clothes as a creation for the porn consumer's sexual desire. Second, she continuously asserts her own subject position, sexuality, and agency, which are often directly contrasted to the usual connotations of the porn star images she represents. Throughout the performance, Sprinkle assumes a position of authority opposed to that of the traditionally perceived sex object for a "specifically male gaze" (Kaplan 33). "Prostitution can also be a wonderful, satisfying job," Sprinkle says "I always felt like a sort of kind nurse, helping people" (13).

The last part of the performance stands in direct contrast to the formal theatrical conventions of the first part. In a long masturbation ritual, called "The Temple of the Sacred Prostitute," Sprinkle shifts her position together with the representational frame. She performs as Anya (not as porn star Annie) who "loves women and puts her focus on liberating their sexual energies." "Annie loves men. Anya adores women. Annie Sprinkle wants an animal attraction. Anya wants a spiritual connection" (118, 119). In this finale of the performance, Sprinkle hands out plastic cups with beans to be shaken to support her trance state and asks the spectators to engage in her sexual spiritual experience. She allows people to leave since the show is over.

Sprinkle transforms the theatrical frame by setting up an environment of candles, incense, and spiritual music in which she uses a large vibrator to masturbate. During the performance in Berlin, she passed this vibrator around the audience first, encouraging the spectators to test its sensation on their skin. Sprinkle manipulates the spectatorial position through shifting the frame of the act of looking. With her eyes closed, she performs a ritual, evidently for herself.

Instead of inviting the spectator to experience pleasure looking at her, Sprinkle offers a shared ritual. Her position shifts from that of the performance artist, who represents a porn star and is in full control of her interaction with the audience members, into one where she ignores them. She provides the illusion of experiencing her own sexual pleasure as opposed to merely describing it or displaying herself for the spectatorial gaze. That is, she invites the spectators to support and sustain her pleasure, her trance. While her body remains the main signifier, Sprinkle claims the performance space for herself, reversing the representation of the pleasure dynamic so that she, not the spectator, is the recipient of pleasure.

Ironically, in a different context like a peep-show, this set up would correspond to the typical male fantasy of the porn star. By changing ambiance, intent, and theatrical mode, by overtly withdrawing her attention from the spectators, Sprinkle undermines the co-optation of her body. The masturbation ritual forces the spectators to choose an attitude between sexual engagement and withdrawal. Shifting out of a traditional performer/spectator dichotomy into a ritual that engages both sides as equal participants counteracts the spectatorial expectation the show has produced up to that point and functions as an alienation technique. The scene points to the equality of the spectators' and performer's sexuality but, simultaneously, prevents the spectators' active sexual engagement. Unlike in a peep-show, the theatrical conventions put the spectators on display, too. Sprinkle invites them to move from being passive consumers into ritual participants, which positions them as performers. In both Berlin and Chicago, when Sprinkle engaged in this sexual ritual, spectators obviously lost interest and left. Sprinkle remained the last person in the auditorium.

Overall, the performance uncovers conventional representations of "pornography"—in which the displayed female body is valued because it has no identity—and exposes its social and cultural constructedness. Sprinkle's body speaks. It is not subjugated to the presentational frame of silent passivity. Through the layering of presenting herself as representation, revealing the process of pornographic display, and expressing her own sexual desires, Sprinkle exposes the sexualized body/object as a construct and subverts traditional connotations of "pornography" with women as submissive objects.

Ideally, from a postmodern perspective, these strategies of demystification function to expose the spectator's complicity in producing the images and disturb his/her comfortable consumer position. Nonetheless, the conflict between the piece's political potential (at least in my interpretation) and Sprinkle's mode of representation consists in the presentation of her naked body which can be co-opted as a site for masculine desire. The strong images Sprinkle displays read to some extent independently of the frame directly created during the performance

piece. My own experience showed that the piece does not necessarily produce a disruptive spectatorial position. Instead, in Berlin, Sprinkle became complicit in the creation of a typical male sexual fantasy of herself.

The specific cultural apparatus of the performance seemed to have direct consequences on the dynamic of exchanges between spectators and performer in the two sites. In his article "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performances," Marvin Carlson points out that genre and the audience's expectations in relation to that genre play an important part in the creation of meaning for any performance (95). Public advertising for a performance (where? by whom?) as well as the effects of "institutionalized 'readers'—dramaturgs and reviewers"—have a strong impact on the spectators' expectations. Carlson points out that

> almost no organized work has been done on the other end of this process—what an audience brings to the theatre in the way of expectations, assumptions, and strategies which interact with the stimuli of the theatre event to produce whatever effect the performance has on an audience and what effect the audience has upon it. (97)

This complex interplay of performer and spectators who produce the performance text together is important here, as Sprinkle's intent and the images she displays seem to be in direct contrast to each other. In the Berlin performance, the change of the conventional (sex show) frame did not counteract the imaginary frame that spectators brought to the theatre.

In order to function subversively, Sprinkle's piece needs to raise the spectators' expectations and rely on their preconceived notions of pornography. Phillip Zarrilli points out that "an expectation is the act of 'looking forward' to seeing (Latin: ex + spectare). Expectations are an aspect of the perceiving consciousness" (151). Zarrilli suggests four independent ways in which expectations are created for a performance:

> (1) the daily experiences that each spectator brings to the performance (such as train rides, marriages, funerals, etc.); (2) performance experiences similar to or different from the one that each is having now; (3) expectations created by publicity, word of mouth, etc.; and (4) what happens in the here and now of this particular performance. (151)

This model of the different elements through which the spectatorial position is determined is useful in narrowing the factors that can be influenced to anticipate

the range of spectatorial responses. Although Zarrilli's concept implies that all four of these aspects are created in and are a result of the cultural, social, and historical context, I suggest acknowledging the context itself, one might call it "the cultural environment," as a separate factor.

Evidently, the first element Zarrilli points out—daily experience—is subject to the daily or weekly experiences of the individual spectator and cannot be anticipated in detail. In contrast, the second factor Zarrilli mentions—the comparison to other performances—plays a key role in the construction of the spectator of Sprinkle's show. As Zarrilli points out, "the second set of expectations forms the ground upon which the audience perceives the performance at hand: the degree to which the performance does or does not jive with previous experiences of performance" (151). This includes expectations raised by the performance site and by the genre of performance art or, more specifically, for Sprinkle's piece, by a one-woman performance.

In both Berlin and Chicago, the performance space raised clear expectations for me in terms of the performance itself. The UFA-Factory is a performance site in Berlin, communally owned by a left-wing group of people who invite unknown international artists and produce dance or music events. It includes a fairly large territory that incorporates housing for people who own it; a small dorm where visiting artists usually stay; a public cafe serving health food and at least four spaces where different display events usually happen at the same time. Although the UFA receives funding from the government, it only produces performances that represent the politics of the site, which are usually in direct opposition to mainstream theatres and overtly critical of conservative politics. The spectators are students, artists, or intellectuals (especially for performances in foreign languages).

A similar expectation was raised by what I had heard about Theatre Oobleck in Chicago. But while the UFA is a very well-known site in the alternative scene in Berlin, Theatre Oobleck, according to Karen Briede, the producer of Sprinkle's shows at this venue, is mainly known in performance and theatre circles.

Furthermore, spectatorial expectations and responses might be influenced by knowing the size of the theatre. While the space in which Sprinkle performed at the UFA has 350 seats, Theatre Oobleck has 150. In either space, I would expect a one-woman performance piece. The anticipation of a political, unconventional performance piece in an intimate setting framed my expectations.

By positioning what is traditionally and in the mainstream known as "pornographic display" in an alternative performance site, Sprinkle moved the familiar imagery and iconography into an unfamiliar frame. "Pornographic display" is conventionally not associated with a political performance. Staging the piece in the UFA or the Oobleck, therefore, mixes two different sets of

spectatorial expectations: those around pornographic images (presented in an unfamiliar frame), and those of the familiar frame, i.e., the performance site (that presents images not associated with the site). By mixing the two forms of display—performance art and "pornography"—Sprinkle basically creates her own genre while theoretically subverting the spectators' expectations on each side.

Directly linked to performance experiences and spectatorial expectations is the third element Zarrilli points out: publicity, advertising, and reviews. For Sprinkle's show, these seemed to be related to local attitudes towards the graphic display of sexual images. "*The Chicago Tribune* wouldn't even touch it," Briede said. Achy Obejas reviewed the performance for *The Chicago Reader*, the alternative weekly newspaper that announces the display events in town. According to Briede, the show sold out after the review was published.[3] In Berlin, all local newspapers ran at least a brief review which varied according to the politics of the different newspapers.[4] The most important publicity was a report on the nightly local T.V. news, Berliner Abendschau, which actually showed parts of Sprinkle's "bosom ballet." The review described her show as unconventional and challenging but clearly encouraged the viewers' curiosity and represented Sprinkle as a spectacle. This announcement, given that the Abendschau is highly popular and watched by the majority of Berliners every night, immediately made Sprinkle familiar throughout the city.

Having known the UFA-Factory and its performance repertory for many years, my expectations for the Sprinkle piece were clear in spite of the T.V. and newspaper announcements. Most pieces I had seen there were at least implicitly feminist or overtly political. Used to purchasing tickets directly at the ticket office on the night of the performance, I was surprised to discover that the show was almost sold out when I got to the UFA with a (female) friend that Friday night (July 26, 1991). Tickets cost about 30 marks (about $15), approximately twice as much as usual. I was even more surprised to discover that the audience did not consist of the usual people, but that slang, dialects, and sexist remarks characterized many conversations in the lobby before the show. These were also the comments most audible during the show. The audience seemed highly mixed in terms of the (predominantly white) spectators' backgrounds (class, gender, sexual preference), which was reflected in the various voices and calls to the performer and to other spectators during the show. "Traditional UFA-goers" were in the distinct minority, although visible. The audience mixture resulted in a rather aggressive atmosphere overall. After the intermission, Sprinkle answered "any question you want to ask" (which she had been collecting during intermission). Questions like "Do you want to fuck tonight?" were in direct contrast to "Do you think your show is political?" In most instances, I could

identify the gender of the questioner. Certain ways of asking directly reflected the gender dichotomy that the performance text created that night.

In Berlin, public advertising and reviews evidently resulted in the co-optation of an alternative performance space for mainstream representation. Although Sprinkle performed the same piece that, after watching her show in Chicago, I have described as subversive, postmodern, and demystifying, the performance text created at the UFA was mainly that of a pornographic display. The piece did not counteract the expectations of those spectators who had come to see a sexual display. Sprinkle became a sexual commodity while the political and social content of her show was mostly ignored. To me as a female spectator identifying with Sprinkle, she was subjected to verbal degradation by male voices from the audience. Zarrilli suggests that "reception is both individual and collective" (150). For Sprinkle's piece, my individual reception was evidently determined by the collective one. My own response was more in relation to the other spectatorial discourses for which Sprinkle had merely been a stimulus than to the display itself. I was highly aware of the gender division of the audience. More specifically, I constantly felt the presence of those male spectators in the audience who seemed to use the piece to display, confirm, and feed off their own and each other's sexism. I was extremely offended when Sprinkle, actively engaging in conversations with individual male spectators from the stage, seemed to encourage this sexism, displaying herself as the sexual spectacle for their desire. I positioned myself "automatically" as a woman who was being looked at through the sexism in the audience.

Evidently, the show's attempt to create its own set of expectations was subsumed under those spectatorial attitudes that had already existed before the show started. Sprinkle lent herself to this co-optation without protest and reinforced the dominant representation and perception of a prostitute and porn star. In contrast to the Chicago performance, the piece did not expose the male gaze but was instead subjected to it. Zarrilli argues that "a set of expectations is created as the performance is enacted" (151). At the UFA, my expectations developed mainly in relation to the variety of spectatorial responses.

Several reasons can be given for the creation of this particular performance text, all related to the context through which the show was framed which I earlier called the "cultural environment." First, the show was in English, while the spectators were mostly German, and the content of many of Sprinkle's speeches was lost. Many spectators' attention was automatically directed towards reading her body and the images it represented. The body became an unmediated signifier and was immediately enclosed in the conventional frame for a sexual display. Second, as mentioned above, public advertising played a significant role in creating audience expectations, but this publicity was itself framed by the

discourses that surround it. In Germany, prostitution and pornography are legal and basically uncensored, which explains why the mainstream media advertised and described the piece without hesitation. In fact, a few years ago, the biggest German (cultural) feminist magazine *Emma* published several special issues as part of an anti-porn campaign but was strongly attacked by mainstream media for wanting to introduce censorship. Third, the week-end night with its week-end tourists, seeking pure entertainment and titillation, seemed to be significant in producing the show's meaning.

While all these aspects of the "cultural environment" and surrounding discourses determine the creation of any performance, their combination evidently produced the meaning of Sprinkle's piece in its Berlin performance, independent of all the theatrical and strategic devices that Sprinkle uses to foreground the constructedness of pornography.

In contrast, the Chicago show was framed through the current NEA debates in the U.S. around the display of "pornographic" images in art. Many academics and artists support the perpetuation of pornography as part of their leftist political agenda. Since the Helms debate focused on the display of "obscene images" and was at first largely directed against the "homoerotic photographs" of Robert Mapplethorpe, the gay communities have been highly invested in the anti-censorship-campaign. The feminist community is split into two groups; while many cultural feminists, with women like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon on the forefront, consider pornography as stimulating violence against women, materialist feminists like Jill Dolan regard pornography as just another form of representation.[5] In the light of these political debates, and given the cultural taboos against "obscenity" in the United States, the audience for Sprinkle's piece in a small performance space like Theatre Oobleck did not consist of those conservative forces that want to censor pornography. Likewise, cultural feminists who perceive Sprinkle as implicitly perpetuating violence against women would hardly attend a performance. For the Theatre Oobleck, unlike for the UFA, the spectators' responses were in accordance with my expectation based on the theatre itself and the current political climate. In addition, during the weekend of October 25-27, 1991, an anti-censorship conference took place in which Sprinkle had participated. On Saturday, the 26th, when I saw the performance, many of the panelists were in the audience. The atmosphere was appreciative of the piece as a political statement. Sprinkle addressed some of the gay panelists directly from the stage and engaged them in a brief conversation, extending the performance into an affirmation of the anti-censorship camp. By framing her show in this way, by gearing the performance to a specific audience, Sprinkle directed the spectator's attention towards representation itself rather than towards the images represented.

Spectators who followed Sprinkle's invitation to move close to the stage and take pictures were rather intimidated, seemingly aware of exposing their own gaze to other audience members. Instead of limiting their response to one of sexual consumption, the spectators seemed to appreciate Sprinkle's presentation intellectually. The performance event was not framed through overt, hostile or derogatory spectator comments, so the performance strategies I described earlier seemed to direct the spectator's attention effectively. The audience composition and the cultural, temporal context worked to produce a dynamic that was the opposite of that in Berlin.

What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis so far? Zarrilli's differentiation between elements that shape the audience's expectations for a performance is helpful in identifying and assessing the contributing factors. This model might in fact help in both explaining and anticipating spectatorial responses. However, it is not comprehensive. Its efficacy depends to a large extent on the weight that each of these factors needs to be given, and this weight seems to shift. The UFA-Factory production of Sprinkle's show was advertised on the mainstream media like most other shows produced there. It could not be anticipated that the performance space would be frequented by traditional viewers of pornography, some of whom had probably never before visited the UFA.

In both sites, the constellation of spectators had a major impact on how I perceived the performance. My own emotional reaction largely depended on the other spectators' reactions to the show, provoking spontaneous anger and rejection of Sprinkle's display in one situation and spectatorial pleasure and political satisfaction in the other. I experienced the display as part of a spectatorial collective by whose dynamics I either felt silenced or encouraged. I, therefore, watched each performance from a different subject position.

In addition, the piece structurally offers two spectatorial positions from which it can be viewed. Sprinkle performs her "self," and, simultaneously, demonstrates the constructedness of her body as she transformed into a porn star, pointedly revealing the masquerade she put on in order to please male demands. This display makes the spectator believe in a real ("This is what I felt, wanted, hated") and a fictional ("This is the image I created for you,") world and offers two ways of reading. One invites the spectators to listen to Sprinkle's "story" and identify with her; the other suggests they look at the display, at the images that are familiar in a different context. In moments when Sprinkle responds to the question "Do you want to fuck tonight," these two layers dissolve, "real" and "fictional" worlds melt together, suggesting that authenticity and artificial display cannot be separated any more.[6]

Moreover, the "collective" spectatorial response can override or cut off the possibility of differentiating between both levels. The result is a complex of

influences which shape the responses at any moment. In Berlin, the other spectators' responses precipitated me into identifying with Sprinkle and foreclosed an analytical response.

Rethinking my own responses, then, involves assessing two spontaneous, simultaneous impulses that are determined by spectatorial habits, by the willingness to differentiate between fiction and truth, and by acknowledging that any subversiveness in the piece is already part of my interpretation. Perhaps the best example for this dichotomy is the scene in which Sprinkle performs "100 Blow Jobs." She sits on her knees and sucks on a number of differently sized dildos attached to a board while loud male voices demand through loudspeakers that she give them sexual pleasure. This moment demonstrates how a prostitute is forced to perform and give sexual satisfaction. At the Berlin performance, this image shifted my position immediately. Previously I had experienced anger at the piece, the performer, the audience, and the frame; I now got emotionally involved in the fictional world, identified with Sprinkle's presentation and felt empathy for the humiliation she represented. In Chicago, during this part I thought about the "emotional labor" or service a prostitute performs in comparison to, for instance, a stewardess or a waitress.[7] The audience's collective sympathetic participation permitted my own analytical reaction.

Surprise—both in terms of the unfamiliar images in a familiar performance space and in terms of the audience's reactions—largely shaped my participation during the Berlin show. In contrast, having previously viewed the piece influenced my second reception in Chicago. Viewing the familiar piece in an unfamiliar theatrical space but different cultural frame allowed me to distance myself and analyze the show with less emotional involvement/identification to undermine my critical evaluation.

Sprinkle performs and presents herself through her own lived experience. However, she also presents herself as a representation, as a commodity for sexual desire. Although I continue to assert that pornography remains just one form of representation, the images Sprinkle constructs are highly loaded because of the discursive, "cultural environment" of "pornography." This environment determines and constructs the spectatorial experience to a higher degree than in the display of conventional theatrical images of the body. The performance text in Berlin may have silenced the feminist spectator while the one in Chicago undercut the traditional (male) consumption of "pornographic images," because ultimately, "pornography" and its consumption, like any other market product, are determined through the larger cultural and economic frame. While traditional notions may be foregrounded or reinforced, "pornographic" images remain a significant commodity to which Sprinkle overtly lends herself.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Sprinkle made more money in Berlin than in Chicago. Her show at the UFA was sold out every night while the Oobleck only sold out after the review in the Chicago Reader had been published.[8] Her personal opinions might be heard and acknowledged. Spectators might realize her strategies of foregrounding representation and exposing the constructedness of her body. Yet, her body itself remains a text, a representational site on which the various reactions are projected—a site for the arousal of sexual desire or for the representation of a political camp.

Annie's Toy Chest. Photo by Angelika Czekay.

Notes

1. The term "pornography" is a highly loaded construct whose connotations seem to vary with different political contexts and agendas. While I personally regard the term as a cultural myth I am using it in this article along the lines of Eileen O'Neill's definition. O'Neill uses "pornography to refer to sexually explicit representations that have arousal as an aim." Eileen O'Neill, "(Re)Presentations of Eros: Exploring Female Sexual Agency," *Gender/Body/Knowledge, Feminist*

Reconstructions of Being and Knowing, eds. Alison Jagger and Susan Bordo (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1989) 69.

2. This paper is invested in the anti-censorship campaign but, for reasons of space, does not engage in detail in the current debates around "pornography" and censorship.

3. The review from *The Chicago Reader*, "This Woman Is Serious," from October 25, 1991 interprets the show as subversive, especially in terms of Sprinkle's interaction with individual spectators.

4. During the third week of July, at least *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Berliner Zeitung* and *TAZ* reviewed Sprinkle's piece. Except for *TAZ* all are mainstream local Berlin newspapers. The three local magazines that present Berlin display events acknowledged the show. *Der Tagesspiegel*, in politics and reputation comparable to the *New York Times*, reviewed the show twice, on July 17 and 19, 1991. Both reviews evaluate it as ironic and subversive in terms of representing pornography. However, detailed descriptions like "An American sex-fairy with . . . amazing breasts," also address those spectators who just want to watch a nude woman [my translation]. Obviously, *Der Tagesspiegel* also addresses a wider range of readers than *The Chicago Reader*, both in terms of numbers and variety of readers. Note also the title from *Der Tagesspiegel* review from July 17, 1991, "Lust kommt von lustig" (Lust derives from funny) in comparison to *The Chicago Reader*'s title, "This Woman Is Serious."

5. For the cultural feminist side of the debate, see especially Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989). For the materialist feminist, anti-censorship discussions, see Jill Dolan's articles, "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance," *Theatre Journal* 39.2 (1987): 156-174, and "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," *TDR*, 33.1 (1989): 59-67; also see, *Caught Looking. On Feminism, Pornography and Censorship*, eds. Kate Ellis, Nan D. Hunter, Beth Jaker, et al. (New York: Caught Looking, 1989). For the current discussions around the NEA funding, see, for instance, *Art Journal Censorship I* 50.3 (1991).

6. From a poststructuralist perspective, the differentiation between "real" and "fictional" is a construct since both "worlds" are representations. Nevertheless, in this context it serves as a tool for assessing different spectatorial habits. Kendall Walton, in *Mimesis As Make Believe*, examines the interactive nature of entering a fictional world, describing the actor, reader, and viewer as what he calls "reflexive props . . . that generate fictional truth about themselves" in a make-believe situation (213). Walton suggests that "we have a strong inclination to think of fictionality as a species of truth, even though we know better" (205). Kendall Walton, *Mimesis As Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990). What is important here is that Sprinkle demonstrates a "real" world to contrast it to the artificiality of the pornographic display: deconstructing conservative notions of the porn star which result from believing in fictionality as truth. It might be argued that pornography can only function because of the consumer's willingness to regard the pornographic body as "real," the porn star as "essentially," "naturally" sexy and seductive. For a complementary analysis, see also Elinor Fuchs' acute discussion of an earlier Sprinkle show. Elinor Fuchs, "Staging the Obscene Body," *TDR* 33.1 (1989): 33-58. For a complex discussion of female performance artists who perform as "themselves," see Jeanie Forte, "Focus on the Body: Pain, Praxis, and Pleasure in Feminist Performance," *Critical Theory and Performance*, eds. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 248-262.

7. For a sophisticated discussion of the notion of "emotional labor," see Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983).

8. Sprinkle performed again at the UFA from May 13 through 31, 1992.

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